

Virginia Strategic Planning for Statewide Interoperability



Focus Group 5

Manassas, VA
May 4, 2004
Follow Up Report



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Introduction

The Governor of Virginia has recognized the need to address interoperability in communities throughout the Commonwealth and has charged the Office of Public Safety to design a strategic plan for statewide interoperability. The involvement of local and statewide emergency responders is essential to the success of developing a Statewide Interoperability Strategic Plan.

In order to develop a collaborative Statewide Interoperability Strategic Plan, the Office of Public Safety is conducting six (6) focus group sessions, comprised mainly of informal and formal leaders from fire, law enforcement, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) departments. Additional representation includes public health, local and state agencies, in order to accurately capture local perspectives on the state of interoperable communications in Virginia.

The outcomes and purpose of the focus group sessions are as follows:

- ☐ Capture of local emergency responder perspectives on interoperable communications
- ☐ Shared understanding of interoperability issues specific to each region of VA
- ☐ Education and shared awareness of interoperability issues across stakeholder groups
- ☐ Attention paid to emergency responder commonalities as opposed to differences

Each focus group session is designed as a series of conversations centered on the following: interoperability, statewide and regional, as it relates to the current state, the case for why change needs to happen, the envisioned future state, recommended strategies to pursue, and barriers to achieving the future state.

Executive Summary

The Northern Virginia focus group session on May 4, 2004 provided valuable input from the local perspective for the development of the Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan. The focus group identified the following major initiatives to be considered during the strategic planning session on May 18th: (1) Integrate disparate CAD systems, (2) Protect and

expand the ability to communicate interference free, (3) Establish a single regional Public Safety Answering Point, and (4) Adopt a technical standard for radio communications.

Detailed Overview

Current State

The objective of the Current State is to affirm the facts and identify the problems related to interoperability in day-to-day activities and mutual aid efforts.

The Northern Virginia focus group identified the following Current State themes specific to Day-to-Day and Mutual Aid interoperability:

- Nextel 800MHz Rebanding Consensus Plan has not been adopted by the FCC, effecting the 800MHz system in the National Capital Region (NCR)
- Localities are not able to communicate directly with the VA State Police
- Users have not received training on how to operate the radios
 - Example: While conducting an Anthrax drill with the school bus system, a medical director requested five 800MHz radios, but school buses are not interoperable with these radios
- Radio interoperability exists: Technology exists to communicate across disciplines within the NCR
 - Except Prince Georges County, MD
- No priority is given to public safety for cell phone use in the event of an emergency
- CAD systems are not integrated across the NCR
 - Example: Fairfax County, Arlington County, and City of Alexandria CAD systems cannot determine which jurisdiction is closest to the scene of an incident as attempts are made to provide the fastest response; a dispatch center is used to obtain this information
- No common language
 - Police use different ten codes
- An Incident Management Team is being developed to help sustain operation in incident response
 - Training for cross jurisdictional support after first 24 hours of incident
- Lack of operational framework
- Metropolitan Area is training for major events
 - Live weekend drills to prepare for disasters such as airplane crashes
- Cache of radios with portable computers have been purchased; Fairfax and Montgomery counties are coordinating this effort

- No explicit plans for training and coordination for the equipment

Fire and EMS specific:

- Operate on an 800MHz system
- Operational agreements exist between some jurisdictions:
 - Arlington County, City of Alexandria, and Fairfax County
 - Fairfax County and Prince William County
 - Fairfax County and Loudoun County
 - Arlington County and District of Columbia
- Standard operating procedure agreements for all of Northern Virginia were established in April 2004, clarifying how military, fire and EMS agencies will cooperate with the local, state and federal levels at an incident scene

Case for Change

The objective of the Case for Change conversation is to discuss the consequences and implications if changes to Virginia's state of interoperable communications do not occur. The Case for Change statements should appeal to the emotions of individuals and result in action.

The Northern Virginia focus group identified the following Case for Change:

Responsibility:

- Safety is the primary job of elected officials
- Protecting our open society and the way we live is our fundamental responsibility to our citizens
- Failure is not an option when it comes to the 911 system - consider your expectations when it comes to the health and safety of your loved ones - this is true for the public safety community and interoperability

Considerations:

- Vulnerabilities of the region:
 - Target for terrorism: not a matter of if, but when
 - Proximity of international airports
 - Concentration of terrorist cells due to proximity to DC
 - High density of population
 - Road system prevents people from evacuating the area in emergencies
- Delays in communication may result in jeopardizing the health and safety of our first responders in day to day operations and the potential of responding to a major event
- Communications is the core of the command and control structure in the public safety community

- The effort needs to begin now since it takes time to implement and establish the infrastructure necessary to fully equip our public safety responders

Approach:

- Federal government is eager to fund efforts that support local and state strategies for interoperability
- Use sales tax increase for partial funding
- Leverage investments that have already been made in the communications infrastructure
- Funding this effort will support the set up of a governance board that will drive the implementation of the strategic plan

Future State

The objective of the Future State conversation is to discuss what interoperability in Virginia should be.

The Northern Virginia focus group highlighted the following elements of the Future State of communications interoperability in Virginia:

- One (1) regional interoperability system enables any public safety responder to communicate with any other responder in the state
 - Seamless voice and data
 - Redundancy and scaleable
 - Used for day to day and large events
 - User friendly
 - Self-adjusts to correct system and human failure
- Operate from agreed upon standard of operation and validated set of requirements
- Umbrella structure exists for interoperability policies and procedures
- Management infrastructure values and invests in maintenance and recurring training on the system
- No unnecessary jurisdictional boundaries:
 - Purchase, maintain, and train together when appropriate
- Public safety has priority use of cell phone cells
- Sufficient and available dedicated spectrum exists in the present and future
- Equipment is in vehicles and in command centers
- Training is built into buying and maintenance

- Software defined radios are operated via satellite; spectrum is no longer required
- GPS video is real time enabling the public safety community to tie into the first responders on the scene
- Citizens and public safety partner to share information via the 311 and 922 citizen links

Strategy



The purpose of the Strategy conversation is to identify the fundamental strategic initiatives essential to successfully implement a statewide interoperability plan in Virginia.

The Northern Virginia team identified the following critical initiatives to achieve communications interoperability statewide:

1. Integrate disparate CAD systems.
2. Protect and expand our ability to communicate interference free:
 - a. Set firm date to move television stations out of the 700mhz band and expand to public safety users (channels 68-72); all to public safety; and
 - b. Move Nextel out of the public safety space (806).
3. Establish a single regional Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP), with redundant capabilities, for Northern Virginia, and ultimately the National Capital Region.
4. Implement and adhere to a technical standard for radio communication.

Barriers

The purpose of the Barriers conversation is to identify factors hindering the effort to achieve the Future State.

The Northern Virginia team identified the following barriers in implementing a statewide plan for interoperability:

- Lack of substantial political support
 - Insufficient buy-in, funding, and resources
 - Spending money on other equipment rather than moving to core solutions for interoperability
- Regional agendas: "...the Great State of Northern Virginia..."
- Lack of configuration management
 - Technology enhancements to one jurisdiction's radio system impact surrounding jurisdictions since equipment may be shared across jurisdictions
- High variety of vendors and products lends to inconsistent purchasing across disciplines and jurisdictions

Next Steps

The outcomes from the six (6) regional focus group sessions will drive the strategic planning session so that the key initiatives identified can serve as the cornerstones of the Statewide Interoperability Strategic Plan. The strategic planning session is scheduled to take place in Richmond, Virginia on May 18, 2004.

There is a strong commitment to maintain the communication flow between the Office of Public Safety and the participants of each focus group as the planning for statewide interoperability in Virginia progresses. This report details the results of the Northern Virginia focus group meeting and was distributed to the participants by Monday May 10, 2004. In addition, the results of the conversations with all six (6) focus groups will be made available to all participants by mid-May.

Participants of the May 4, 2004 focus group meeting, in Manassas, Virginia, on VA Strategic Planning for Statewide Interoperability:

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Please contact Chris Essid to obtain contact information for the federal representatives at the Manassas Focus Group session.